BEAR CREEK

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

(Phase Two)

A Proposal by the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
September 11, 1998

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
MANAGEMENT PLANS
SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

BEAR CREEK
Conservation Easements (Phase Two)

Two proposals by Montana, Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Included in This Document:

- **Draft Environmental Assessments**
- **Draft Management Plans**
- **Socio-Economic Assessments**

Comment period on these proposals is from September 11, 1998 until October 12, 1998. Submit Comments to:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
c/o Bear Creek Easement Comments
1400 South 19th
Bozeman, MT 59718

A public hearing on these proposals will be held on October 8, 1998 at 7 p.m. at the High School Library in Ennis, MT

For additional information contact:

Kurt Alt, Wildlife Biologist, (406) 994-6935 or
Joel Peterson, Region 3 Wildlife Manager, (406) 994-6936

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Wildlife Division

Draft Environmental Assessment

BEAR CREEK CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

The state of Montana recognizes that certain native plant communities constituting wildlife habitat are worthy of perpetual conservation. These communities include riparian, sagebrush-grassland, and intermountain grassland. Properties owned by the Choate and Storey families include such habitats, intermixed with hay fields, and warrant perpetual conservation consideration. The terms of the proposed conservation easements on these properties reflect the families' desire to maintain the agricultural character and production of the land while enhancing wildlife habitats. It is proposed that separate conservation easements be purchased by FWP from each family protecting the habitat in perpetuity. The proposed easements will allow the properties to remain in private ownership and operation while preserving important wildlife habitats and perpetuating existing public recreational opportunities.

II. AUTHORITY AND DIRECTION

FWP has the authority under law (87-1-201) to protect, enhance and regulate the use of Montana's fish and wildlife resources for public benefit now and in the future. In 1987, the Montana Legislature passed HB 526 which earmarked hunting license revenues to secure wildlife habitat through lease, conservation easement, or fee title acquisition (87-1-241 and 242). This is now referred to as the Habitat Montana Program. As with other FWP real property proposals, the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and the State Land Board must approve these conservation easement proposals. This Environmental Assessment (EA) is part of the decision making process as directed by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA).

III. LOCATION OF THE PROJECT

The properties are located in Madison County east of Cameron, Montana (Figure 1). The proposed easements block up important habitat adjacent to the Bear Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA), and the Beaverhead National Forest and augment already established conservation efforts made by both FWP and the Montana Land Reliance. The land involves 3,527.4 deeded acres; 1,605.36 acres are owned by the Choate family (Storey-Madison Ranch) and 1,922.04 acres are owned by the Adeline M. Storey Living Trust (Storey Ranch). All of the land is located in deer and elk Hunting District 360 This block of contiguous land is bordered by the Granger Ranch to the north, land owned by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) to the west, the FWP Bear Creek WMA and the Kelly Ranch to the east, and the Bear Creek Angus Ranch Conservation Easement, the Kelly Ranch and the R Bar R Ranch to the south.

IV. PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the proposed easements is to preserve the integrity of the native habitat on the land while, at the same time, maintaining agricultural land uses and private ownership. A secondary purpose is to maintain the public hunting opportunities which presently exist on the land. Portions of the property possess high value sagebrush/grassland habitat. All of the parcels provide winter range for an elk population that winters in the Bear/Mill Creeks area including the WMA, Bear Creek Angus Ranch Conservation Easement area and adjacent private lands. The upper portions provide year round range for mule deer, while the lower portions provide year round range for antelope and white-tailed deer. Mill Creek crosses the northern most portion of both the Choate and Storey properties and possess habitat values associated with the riparian area that are important to the above as well as moose, black bear and a wide variety of non-game species.

Although the primary species benefited by the proposed easements would be elk and mule deer, antelope and whitetailed deer will also benefit. From 35 to 40 different species of non-game birds and about 18 different species of small mammals are expected to use the land throughout the course of the year. Sandhill cranes, mallards, and Canada geese also use the area during various times of the year. The species list which follows contains a comprehensive list of wildlife species which would benefit from preserving current uses on the land (Appendix A).

The Choate property is presently on the market for sale, and without the proposed deed restrictions , it is likely that the property may be developed for more intensive uses that would fragment important wildlife habitat. Without the proposed easement, the existing hunting opportunities on the land may also be restricted, or eliminated. Until recently, the Storey family had leased the Choate lands and had managed this lease as a part of their livestock operation. As a result, the sale of that property may also affect the future uses of the Storey land. The proposed easements will ensure continued agricultural use of the land that is compatible with wildlife.

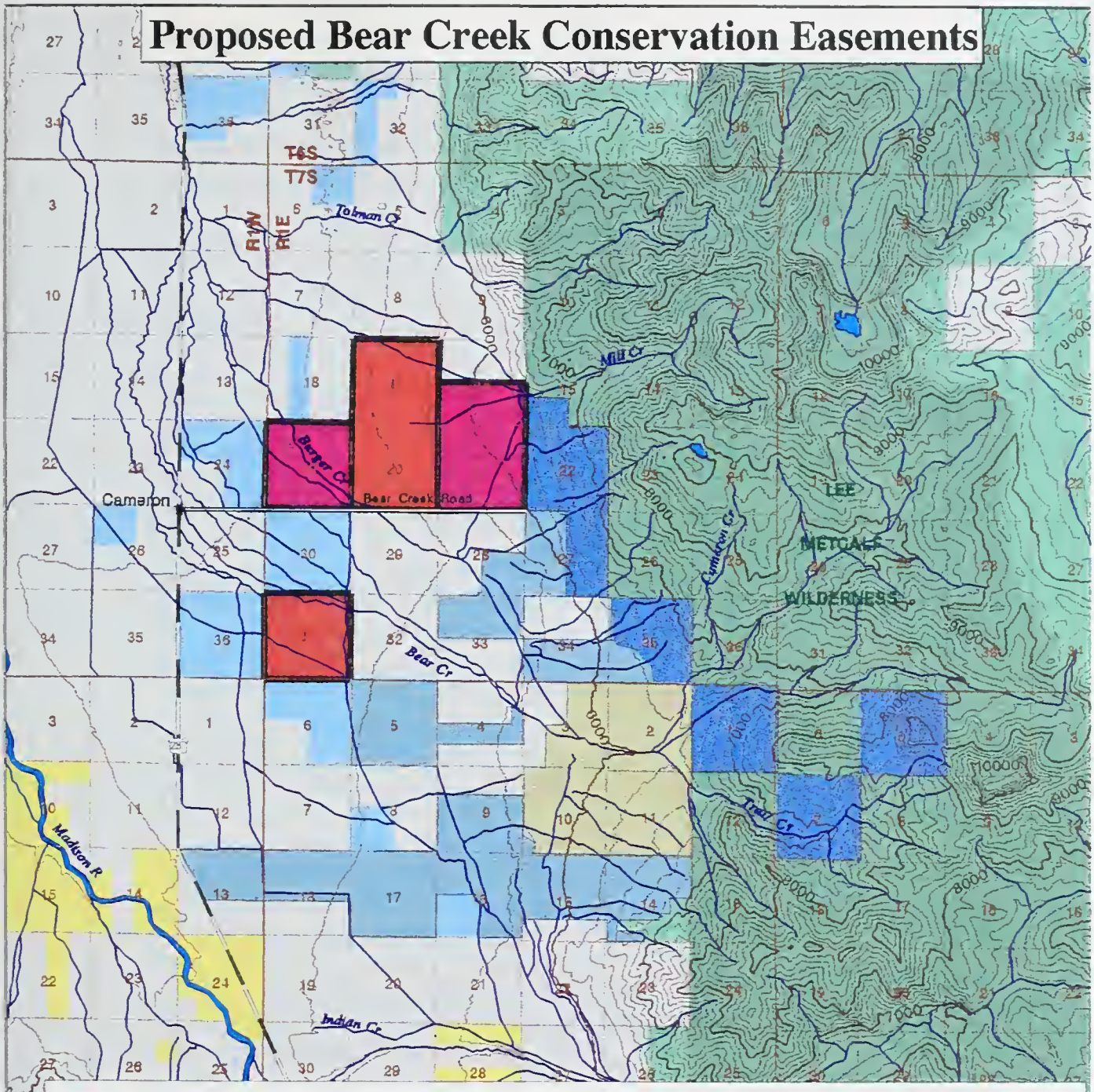
V. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTIONS

The proposed actions are for FWP to acquire and monitor three permanent conservation easements on a total of 3,527.4 acres. Funds for the acquisition will come from the Habitat Montana Program. The purchase price for the proposed easements is as follows:

A. Choate property consisting of 1,605.36 acres - $450,000
B. Storey property consisting of 1,922.04 acres - $500,000

Costs associated with implementing the grazing plans (Attachments A and B) are as follows: $16,000 for water improvements on the Storey-Madison and Storey Ranches and $8,000 for fencing on the Storey-Madison Ranch.

Proposed Bear Creek Conservation Easements



- Choate Proposed Easement
- Storey Proposed Easement
- Bear Creek Angus Easement
- Madison-Bear Creek Wildlife Management Area
- Sphinx Mountain Ranch Easement
- Bureau of Land Management
- National Forest
- National Forest Wilderness
- Private
- State of Montana

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Proposed conservation easements, Bear Creek Angus conservation easement and Madison-Bear Creek Wildlife Management Area from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Information Services Unit, Kalispell, MT. Sphinx Mountain Ranch conservation easement from the Montana Natural Heritage Program, Montana State Library, Helena, MT. All other layers from the Natural Resource Information System, Montana State Library, Helena, MT. Madison-Bear Creek Wildlife Management Area and Bear Creek Angus easement from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Information Services Unit. Kalispell, MT. Bear Creek Angus conservation easement, Sphinx Mountain Ranch conservation easement, and Madison-Bear Creek Wildlife Management Area digitized at 1:24,000. Contours interpolated from Defense Mapping Agency 30 meter Digital Elevation Models. All other layers digitized at 1:100,000.

STREAMNET

INFORMATION SERVICES

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

The specific terms of the easements in their entirety are contained in separate legal documents which are the Deed of Conservation Easements. These documents specify the restrictions on the landowners' activities, and describe FWP's rights as well as the rights retained by the landowners. The restrictions on landowner activities and the rights granted to FWP were negotiated with and agreed to by the landowners and FWP. The intent of the proposed rights and restrictions is to preserve important wildlife habitats in perpetuity while maintaining the agricultural, residential, and public recreational uses which have occurred on the land.

To summarize the terms of the easements:

A. Proposed Choate Easement

FWP's rights include the right to:

(1) identify, preserve and protect specific habitats;
(2) monitor and enforce restrictions ;
(3) prevent activities inconsistent with easement ;
(4) the right, on behalf of the general public of access to the land, by foot, for recreational hunting during all hunting seasons established by the state of Montana;

The Landowners retain all of the rights in the property that are not specifically restricted and that are not inconsistent with the conservation purposes of the proposed easement, including the right to:

(1) reside on the land in the existing residence, or to construct a new residence on the site; also the right to relocate this residential dwelling site providing that the existing site is restored to agricultural use;
(2) pasture and graze livestock, in accordance with sound generally accepted agricultural practices and a Grazing Plan (see attachment A);
(3) regulate the public use of land, subject to the public's access described above;
(4) develop and maintain water resources;
(5) repair, renovate or replace existing agricultural, residential and related structures and improvements;
(6) place or construct one single family residence and out buildings, on a five acre site adjacent to the county road, in Section 19;
(7) construct, remove, repair or replace fences and roads providing that such improvements do not have a material impact on wildlife or wildlife habitat;
(8) place or construct, after prior notice to FWP, additional accessory structures and improvements for residential purposes in the designated building areas;
(9) use agrichemicals for control of noxious weeds in the minimum amount necessary and in a manner that minimizes damage to native plants and sagebrush; aerial application of agrichemicals is prohibited except as approved in advance by FWP;
(10) to use motor vehicles and agricultural equipment in the ordinary course of the landowner's business;

The proposed easement will restrict uses that are inconsistent with the conservation purposes of the easement including the following uses of the property:

(1) control or manipulation of sagebrush;
(2) legal or de facto subdivision;
(3) the removal of timber except gathering of firewood for the Landowner's personal use;
(4) cultivation or farming except on existing haylands;
(5) renting or leasing access to the land for hunting, fishing, or winter recreation;
(6) agricultural activities that are degrading to soil and surface water;
(7) installation of utility structures without prior FWP approval, except those required for allowable residential uses;
(8) mineral exploration, development and extraction by any surface mining method, except gravel for use on the land;
(9) construction of any structure except as described above;
(10) establishment or maintenance of any commercial feed lot;
(11) game farms;
(12) commercial or industrial use except traditional agricultural uses;
(13) processing, dumping or disposal of wastes except for domestic garbage;

B. Proposed Storey Easement

FWP's rights include the right to:
(1) identify, preserve and protect specific habitats;
(2) monitor and enforce restrictions;
(3) prevent activities inconsistent with easement;
(4) the right, on behalf of the general public of access to the land, by foot, for recreational hunting during all hunting seasons established by the state of Montana;

The Landowners retain all of the rights in the property that are not specifically restricted and that are not inconsistent with the conservation purposes of the proposed easement, including the right to:

(1) reside on the land in the existing residence, and new residence provided for;
(2) pasture and graze livestock, in accordance with sound generally accepted agricultural practices and a Grazing Plan (see attachment B);
(3) regulate the public use of land, subject to the public's access described above;
(4) develop and maintain water resources;
(5) repair, renovate or replace existing agricultural, residential and related structures and improvements;
(6) place or construct one additional single family residence and agricultural buildings and associated improvements in a designated new building area in the SE¼SE¼ of Section 20;
(7) construct, remove, repair or replace fences and roads providing that such improvements do not have a material impact on wildlife or wildlife habitat;

(8) place or construct, after prior notice to FWP, additional accessory structures and improvements for residential purposes in the designated building areas;
(9) use agrichemicals for control of noxious weeds in the minimum amount necessary and in a manner that minimizes damage to native plants and sagebrush; aerial application of agrichemicals is prohibited except as approved in advance by FWP;
(10) to use motor vehicles and agricultural equipment in the ordinary course of the landowner's business;

The proposed easement will restrict uses that are inconsistent with the conservation purposes of the easement including the following uses of the property:

(1) control or manipulation of sagebrush;
(2) legal or de facto subdivision;
(3) the removal of timber except gathering of firewood for the Landowner's personal use;
(4) cultivation or farming except on existing cultivated fields;
(5) renting or leasing access to the land for hunting, fishing, or winter recreation;
(6) agricultural activities that are degrading to soil and surface water;
(7) installation of utility structures without prior FWP approval, except those required for allowable residential uses;
(8) mineral exploration, development and extraction by any surface mining method, except gravel for use on the land;
(9) construction of any structure except as described above;
(10) establishment or maintenance of any commercial feed lot;
(11) game farms;
(12) commercial or industrial use except traditional agricultural uses;
(13) processing, dumping or disposal of wastes except for domestic garbage;

VI. DESCRIPTION OF REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTIONS

Three alternatives to the proposed action were considered in this process.

1. No Action Alternative

If this project went unfunded, opportunities to secure an important wildlife area in perpetuity would be lost. FWP's past investments, i.e. acquisition of the Bear Creek WMA, the Bear Creek Angus conservation easement, could be negatively impacted if the Chaote and Storey properties were subdivided. FWP would loose an opportunity to combine its limited resources with not only past department investments but with past conservation easement efforts of one of Montana's private non-profit land trusts in securing, in perpetuity, conservation of a significant block of important wildlife habitat. The current status of the Choate and Storey property is likely to change in the very near future.

2. **Fee Title Acquisition Alternative**

This alternative was **rejected** early in the process because the Legislature and the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission have expressed a preference for the department to pursue the acquisition of conservation easements rather than fee title acquisitions. It is FWP's preference that the land remain in private ownership and agricultural production.

3. **Lease Alternative**

This alternative was discussed but in the end was **rejected.** The various landowners involved in these proposals are not interested in leasing the land, and this alternative was unacceptable because it does not address the issue of subdivision of the land in the future. It is not possible for the Department to provide a long term commitment on a lease of this magnitude with no closure other than termination of the lease. This alternative doesn't provide long term protection of the habitats FWP deems to be important. The loss of agriculture and wildlife habitat in the Madison Valley via subdivision is the most limiting factor affecting the above and leases won't address long term this "most limiting factor".

VII. EVALUATION OF IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. **Land Resources**

Impact of Proposed Actions: No negative impact would occur as a result of these proposals. The terms of the proposed easements are structured to prevent adverse impacts on soils and vegetation. Grazing plans have been developed and will be implemented that will maintain and enhance the soil resources (Grazing Management Plans, Attachments A and B). The harvest of timber from the land is prohibited except for firewood gathering for personal use. Subdivision and development of the land is restricted, as is additional conversion of native range land to cultivated fields. The proposed easement will insure that the land resources are maintained.

No Action Alternative: This alternative would allow for potential disturbance of soils from more intense agricultural practices, surface mining and residential development.

2. **Air Resources**

Impact of Proposed Actions: There would be no impact.

No Action Alternative: There would be no immediate impact. However, if the land were to be subdivided, more human activity could potentially degrade the current air quality.

3. **Water Resources**

Impact of Proposed Actions: There would be no impact in perpetuity over what is currently associated with a working livestock operation. Current agricultural uses on the property have proven to be generally compatible with maintenance of water quality.

No Action Alternative: There would be no immediate impact. However, there would be no assurances that over time the property won't change from primarily agricultural to some other use, with no conservation protection.

4. Vegetation Resources

Impact of Proposed Actions: These actions will result in a positive impact. The terms of the easements protect the quantity, quality and character of the native plant communities found on the properties. The prescribed grazing systems will maintain and enhance the vigor and productivity of the soil and vegetation. The proposed actions also ensure the land's primary use in the future will be agriculture, which depends on maintaining a productive vegetative resource. Noxious weed management will continue to be an important component of successful agricultural operations. The restrictions on the removal of timber will ensure that existing timber resources are maintained.

No Action Alternative: There would be no immediate impact. If the land use were to change from agriculture to subdivision or some other use there would be no conservation measures in place to maintain the productivity of the land. Future impacts to native vegetation and overall productivity of the land could be significant. In addition, there would be no long term protection of existing native plant communities. Noxious weeds would likely increase with fragmentation of ownership and coordination of weed control would become more difficult.

5. Fish/Wildlife Resources

Impact of Proposed Actions: These actions should result in a positive impact overall. The terms of the easements conserve the land as agricultural and open space for winter range as well as year-round habitat for many of Montana's native wildlife species. Large mammals such as elk, mule deer, antelope, moose and bears require large blocks of unsubdivided open space. Large mammals and agriculture can coexist well together as witnessed in Montana today. Conserving native plant communities is important for most of Montana's indigenous wildlife species. Implementation of rest-rotation grazing systems on the land will ensure an adequate quantity and quality of forage for wildlife utilizing the land. No adverse effects are expected on the diversity or abundance of game species, nongame species or unique, rare, threatened or endangered species. There would be no barriers erected to limit wildlife migration or daily movements. There would be no introduction of non-native fish and wildlife species into the area.

No Action Alternative: No immediate impact would occur. However, with no long term conservation measures the land would likely become more developed. As this occurs, open space would diminish over time resulting in significant long term effects to most species of wildlife. There would be no provisions preventing activities such as game farming on the property, as well as the construction of game proof fences or other barriers that could inhibit wildlife movement. Residential

development of this property would significantly reduce the big game winter range carrying capacity.

VIII. EVALUATION OF IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

1. **Noise/Electrical Effects**

   Impact of Proposed Actions: No impact would occur over existing conditions.

   No Action Alternative: There would be no immediate impact.

2. **Land Use**

   Impact of Proposed Actions: There would be no impact with the productivity or profitability of the land nor conflicts with existing land uses in the area. Game damage problems are not expected to increase because the proposed actions are attempting to maintain current wildlife numbers (specifically elk), recreational opportunities, and habitat quality.

   No Action Alternative: No immediate impact would occur. However, with changes in landownership and land use in the future, habitat quality, current wildlife numbers and recreational opportunity will likely be diminished.

3. **Risk/Health Hazards**

   Impact of Proposed Actions: No impact would occur.

   No Action Alternative: No impact would occur.

4. **Community Impacts**

   Impact of Proposed Actions: There would be no anticipated negative impacts to the community. These actions would prevent residential development. The scenic values and open character of this property would be maintained and enjoyed by the community in perpetuity. Also, see attached Socio-Economic Assessments.

   No Action Alternative: No immediate impact would occur . However, hunting access could be restricted in the future, negatively affecting recreational opportunities.

5. **Public Services/Taxes/Utilities**

   Impact of Proposed Actions: There would be no effect on local or state tax bases or revenues, no alterations of existing utility systems nor tax bases of revenues, nor increased uses of energy sources. As agricultural properties, the land would continue to be taxed as it has before. See attached Socio-Economic Assessments.

   No Action Alternative: No immediate impact would occur. Future subdivision and development of the land is likely to increase public demand for government

services such as schools, fire and police protection, road maintenance and residential planning.

6. **Aesthetics/Recreation**

Impact of Proposed Actions: There would be no impact. The easements would maintain in perpetuity the quality and quantity of recreational opportunities and scenic vistas, and would not affect the character of the neighborhood. Also, see attached Socio-Economic Assessments.

No Action Alternative: No immediate impact would occur, however there would be no guarantee of continued public access to the land for recreational purposes. Should subdivision and/or development occur it would reduce the aesthetic and recreational quality of the area. Future landowners may not be as generous with recreational access as have the Choates and Storeys.

7. **Cultural/Historic Resources**

Impact of Proposed Actions: There would be no impact.

No Action Alternative: There would be no anticipated impact.

8. **Socio-Economic Assessment**

Please refer to the attached Socio-Economic Assessments for additional analysis of impacts on the human environment.

IX. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE

The proposed actions should have no negative cumulative effect. However, when considered on a larger scale, these proposed actions pose a substantial positive cumulative effect on wildlife, agriculture, and open space. While these easements are proposed to protect privately-owned wildlife habitats on two ranches, the proposed actions will create a large block of land under conservation adjacent to FWP land and other private land already under conservation easement. Therefore, this proposal will benefit a significantly larger amount of contiguous and important wildlife habitat in perpetuity. In so doing, the land will remain in private ownership, continue to contribute to agricultural production and thus contribute to the local economy.

The "No Action" alternative would not preserve the diversity of wildlife habitats in perpetuity. Without the income from the proposed conservation easements the landowners may consider other income options including the sale or subdivision of the land. Future subdivision, development or other actions, such as game farming, prohibited under the terms of the Proposed Actions would directly replace wildlife habitat. An important undeveloped winter range for elk may be lost, and important public access to private land would likely be lost. In addition, FWP's ability to manage mule deer, antelope and particularly elk populations through hunting would be negatively impacted.

X. EVALUATION OF NEED FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS)

Based on the above assessment, which has not identified any significant negative impacts from the proposed actions, an EIS is not required and an EA is the appropriate level of review. The overall impact from the successful completion of the proposed actions would provide substantial long term benefits to both the physical and human environment.

XI. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public comment on this environmental assessment will be accepted from September 11, 1998 to 5:00 p.m. October 12, 1998. A public meeting on the proposal will be held at 7:00 p.m. at the High School Library in Ennis on October 8, 1998 to solicit public comments. The finalized document and a decision notice will be released to the public by, October 23, 1998. The decision notice will be presented to the Fish , Wildlife & Parks Commission for review at its November 6, 1998 meeting. If approved, the proposal will be presented to the Board of Land Commissioners on November 16, 1998.

COMMENTS

Comments on this environmental assessment should be sent to:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
c/o Bear Creek Easement Comments
1400 South 19th
Bozeman, MT 59715

XII. NAME, TITLE AND PHONE NUMBER OF PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE FOR PREPARING THE E.A.

Kurt Alt, Wildlife Biologist, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1400 South 19th, Bozeman, MT 59715; phone 406-994-6935.

XIII. PERSONS PROVIDING ASSISTANCE INPUT AND OR REVIEW DURING PREPARATION OF THE E.A.

Joel Peterson, Wildlife Manager, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1400 South 19th, Bozeman, MT 59715; phone 406-994-6936.

Stephen Lewis, Regional Supervisor, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1400 South 19th, Bozeman, MT 59715; phone 406-994-4042.

Steve Knapp, Habitat Bureau Chief, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 E. Sixth Ave., Helena, MT 59620; phone (406)444-2612.

Mike Frisina, Range Coordinator, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1330 W. Gold, Butte, MT 59701-2112; phone (406)782-2060.

Karen Hillstrom, Land Agent, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 E. Sixth Ave., Helena, MT 59620; phone (406)444-3974.

Rich Clough, Field Services Administrator, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 E. Sixth Ave., Helena, MT 59620; phone (406)444-3196.

Jack Lynch, Legal Counsel, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 E. Sixth Ave., Helena, MT 59620; phone (406)444-4573.

Rob Brooks, Bioeconomist, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 E. Sixth Ave., Helena, MT 59620; phone 404-444-2535.

APPENDIX A
(Attach Species List)

SPECIES LIST OF MAMMALS, BIRDS, REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS
either known to occur or strongly suspected of occurring
on the
BEAR CREEK CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

MAMMALS

Species

Elk (Cervus elaphus)
Mule deer (Odocoileus hemionus)
White-tailed deer (Odocoileus virginianus)
Pronghorn antelope (Antilocapra americana)
Moose (Alces alces)
Mountain lion (Felis concolor)
Bobcat (Lynx rufus)
Coyote (Canus latrans)
Red fox (Vulpes vulpes)
Black bear (Ursus americanus)
Grizzly bear (Ursus horribilis)
Wolverine (Gulo gulo)
Pine marten (Martes americana)
Long-tailed weasel (Mustela frenata)
Striped skunk (Mephitis mephitis)
Badger (Taxidea taxus)
Porcupine (Erethizon dorsatum)
Raccoon (Procyon lotor)
Yellowbelly marmot (Marmota flaviventris)
Mountain cottontail (Sylvilagus nuttalli)
White-tailed jackrabbit (Lepus townsendii)
Snowshoe hare (Lepus americanus)
Yellow pine chipmunk (Tamias amoenus)
Richardson's ground squirrel (Spermophilus richardsonii)
Red squirrel (Tamiasciurus hudsonicus)
Northern pocket gopher (Thomomys talpoides)
Deer mouse (Peromyscus maniculatus)
Red-backed vole (Clethrionomys gapperi)
Meadow vole (Microtus pennsylvanicus)
Mountain vole (Microtus montanus)
Vagrant shrew (Sorex vagrans)

In addition, there could be as many as three species of bats.

BIRDS

Species

Red-tailed hawk (Buteo jamaicensis)
American kestrel (Falco sparverius)
Northern harrier (Circus cyaneus)
Northern goshawk (Accipiter gentilis)
Sharp-shinned hawk (Accipiter striatus)
Cooper's hawk (Accipiter cooperii)
Swainson's hawk (Buteo swainsoni)
Rough-legged hawk (Buteo lagopus)
Ferruginous hawk (Buteo regalis)
Prairie falcon (Falco mexicanus)
Peregrine falcon (Falco peregrinus)
Merlin (Falco columbarius)
Bald eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus)
Golden eagle (Aquila chrysaetos)
Great horned owl (Bubo virginianus)
Long-eared owl (Asio otus)
Snowy owl (Nyctea scandiaca)
Gray partridge (Perdix perdix)
Blue grouse (Dendragapus obscurus)
Ruffed grouse (Bonasa umbellus)
Sharp-tailed grouse (Tympanuchus phasianellus)
Mourning dove (Zenaida macroura)
Mallard (Anas platyrhynchos)
Blue-winged teal (Anas discors)
Green-winged teal (Anas crecca)
Rock dove (Columbia livia)
Killdeer (Charadrius vociferus)
Sandhill crane (Grus canadensis)
Long-billed curlew (Numenius americanus)
Common nighthawk (Chordeiles minor)
Black-billed magpie (Pica pica)
Black-capped chickadee (Parus atricapillus)
Mountain chickadee (Parus gambeli)
Red-breasted Nuthatch (Sitta canadensis)
House wren (Troglodytes aedon)
Mountain bluebird (Sialia currucoides)
American robin (Turdus migratorius)
European starling (Sturnus vulgaris)
Chipping sparrow (Spizella passerina)
Western meadowlark (Sturnella neglecta)
Common raven (Corvus corax)

Red-naped sapsucker (Sphyrapicus varius)
Downy woodpecker (Picoides pubescens)
Hairy woodpecker (Picoides villosus)
Northern flicker (Colaptes auratus)
Tree swallow (Tachycineta bicolor)
Barn swallow (Hirundo rustica)
Pine siskin (Carduelis pinus)
Spotted sandpiper (Actitis macularia)
Calliope hummingbird (Stellula calliope)
Eastern kingbird (Tyrannus tyrannus)
Horned lark (Eremophila alpestris)
Gray jay (Perisoreus canadensis)
Steller's jay (Cyanocitta stelleri)
Clark's nutcracker (Nucifraga columbiana)
American crow (Corvus brachyrhynchos)
Golden-crowned kinglet (Regulus satrapa)
Ruby-crowned kinglet (Regulus calendula)
Townsend's solitaire (Myadestes townsendi)
Veery (Catharus fuscescens)
Bohemian waxwing (Bombycilla garrulus)
Northern shrike (Lanius excubitor)
Yellow warbler (Dendroica petechia)
Yellow-rumped warbler (Dendroica coronata)
Common yellowthroat (Geothlypis trichas)
Western tanager (Piranga ludoviciana)
Lazuli bunting (Passerina amoena)
American tree sparrow (Spizella arborea)
Dark-eyed junco (Junco hyemalis)
Red-winged blackbird (Agelaius phoeniceus)
Brewer's blackbird (Euphagus cyanocephalus)
Common grackle (Quiscalus quiscula)
Rosy finch (Leucosticte arctoa tephrocotis)
Cassin's finch (Carpodacus cassinii)
House finch (Carpodacus mexicanus)
Red crossbill (Loxia curvirostra)
American goldfinch (Carduelis tristis)
Evening grosbeak (Coccothraustes vespertinus)
House sparrow (Passer domesticus)
Upland sandpiper (Bartramia longicauda)
Olive-sided flycatcher (Contopus borealis)
Western wood-pee (Contopus sordidulus)
Northern rough-winged swallow (Stelgidopteryx serripennis)
Alder flycatcher (Empidonax alnorum)
Willow flycatcher (Empidonax traillii)
Least flycatcher (Empidonax minimus)

MacGillivary's warbler (Oporornis tolmiei)
Vesper sparrow (Pooecetes gramineus)
Savannah sparrow (Passerculus sandwichensis)
Fox sparrow (Passerella iliaca)
Song sparrow (Melospiza melodia)
White-crowned sparrow (Zontirchia leucophrys)
White-winged crossbill (Loxia leucoptera)
Common redpoll (Carduelis flammea)

REPTILES

Species

Western terrestrial garter snake (Thamnophis elegans)
Common garter snake (Thamnophis sirtalis)
Bullsnake (Pituophis melanoleucus)
Racer (Coluber constrictor)

AMPHIBIANS

Species

Western toad (Bufo boreas)
Striped chorus frog (Pseudacris triseriata)

DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN
STOREY-MADISON RANCH CONSERVATION EASEMENT
(Choate Property)

I. INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of the Storey-Madison Ranch (RANCH) conservation easement is to conserve, protect and enhance in perpetuity the productivity and spacial quality of the land required by wildlife and agriculture. Although most wildlife species and agriculture will benefit from this type of land conservation, the terms of this conservation easement are directed at conserving the intermountain grassland habitat. The conservation easement also sets a framework for continued cooperation between the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) and the Ranch in utilizing general public hunting as the tool used to manage wildlife populations on the Ranch.

This management plan sets forth the FWP and Ranch's management responsibilities for implementing the provisions of the conservation easement. Because issues will change over time the management plan should be viewed as a flexible and working document that will receive periodic review.

II. DESCRIPTION OF AREA

The Madison-Storey Ranch is located about twelve miles south of Ennis and lies due east of Cameron, in the Madison Valley of southwestern Montana. Average annual precipitation ranges from 12 to 14 inches. Topography varies from flat valley land on the western fringe to moderate mountain slopes on the eastern portion of the Ranch. Mill Creek flows through the northeastern portion of the Ranch. Elevations on the Ranch range from 5,380 to 6,400 feet.

Native vegetation communities range from predominantly western wheatgrass/ blue bunch wheatgrass/needle and thread grass/feather grass along the lower flat rangeland on the western portion to Idaho fescue/ blue bunch wheatgrass/rye grass/big sagebrush along the upper elevations in the eastern portion.

The area provides key winter range and spring calving/fawning habitat for the primary species, elk and mule deer. The Mill Creek drainage, flowing through the northeastern portion of the ranch; provides year round range for moose. The area, particularly the western section, provides year round range for antelope. White-tailed deer use the area primarily as summer/fall range. Mountain lions use the area mostly during winter periods when ungulate populations are concentrated on the winter range. Black bear use centered around Mill Creek is highest during spring and fall, and occasionally a grizzly bear may pass through the area.

The Ranch has historically provided approximately 60 to 80 hunter days, annually. These hunter days are primarily elk, mule deer and antelope, but can also include white-tailed deer, moose, and occasionally black bear and Hungarian partridge. Because the ranch is winter range, the number of elk and deer using it will fluctuate, given annual winter conditions, and accordingly will affect

participation in the Hunting District 360 late season elk hunt. This accounts for the fluctuation in hunter days for any given year.

However, because the ranch is winter range for elk and deer that primarily use public lands during the spring, summer and fall, it's wildlife contribution to the general public and specifically to the hunting public cannot be accurately assessed based solely on hunter days generated only on the Ranch.

III. GOAL

CONSERVE, PROTECT AND ENHANCE IN PERPETUITY THE WILDLIFE HABITAT AND AGRICULTURAL VALUES OF THE STOREY-MADISON RANCH.

IV. OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

1. MANAGEMENT OF WILDLIFE HABITAT.

* Periodic review of those areas which are native rangelands, that have not been previously cultivated/plowed/tilled, will be conducted to monitor for any change in their status. The location and acreage will be set forth in the baseline report.

* A grazing system and approach has been developed in consultation between FWP and the Ranch for the native rangeland (see Grazing Plan for the Storey-Madison Ranch, Attachment A). The system does not apply to the irrigated meadows which the landowner(s) will continue to manage and graze as agricultural land at their discretion. The grazing system will be monitored on an annual basis to determine compliance with the prescribed grazing plan. This involves determining presence or absence of cattle in various pastures throughout the course of a grazing season and across years (refer to livestock rotation as outlined in the grazing plan, Attachment A).

* Permanent vegetation monitoring sites will be established to monitor range land conditions over time and will be revisited on a 3 to 5 year schedule as needed.

* Periodic review of the land will be conducted to monitor any changes in the status of structures under terms of the easement.

2. MANAGEMENT OF WILDLIFE POPULATIONS.

* The emphasis for population management will be placed on elk. During any given winter, weather can strongly influence the number of wintering elk found in the Bear/Mill Creek area. Management will focus on maintaining winter elk numbers within the landowner tolerance and forage availability, in the range of 900 to 1,400 elk, i.e. no increase in elk numbers currently using the area.

* The Hunting District 360 late elk hunt will continue to be a necessary tool used to manage elk populations in the Bear/Mill Creek area. A significant portion of the wintering elk population that use this area, migrates from Yellowstone National Park and reaches this winter range, in most years, after the close of the general hunting season.

* On the Ranch as well as surrounding properties, game damage problems will continue to be managed through public hunting wherever possible. Game damage assistance will continue to be provided on an as needed basis to the Ranch and surrounding properties that qualify under FWP's game damage statutes and policies.

3. HUNTER/ACCESS MANAGEMENT.

* Access to the ranch is provided from the Bear Creek County Road as well as an existing public access road under easement crossing the Ranch to access the Bear Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA).

* Routine maintenance, signing and weed management at these and other access points on the Bear Creek WMA are all under FWP's responsibilities. Guidelines for weed management are addressed in the Region 3 Weed Management Environmental Analysis.

* General public hunting will be allowed throughout the Ranch. Daily distribution and numbers will be determined by the landowner, based on concerns for the safety of the landowner, ranch personnel, livestock and other hunters.

* Monitoring/reporting of hunter numbers will be done annually. When public demand exists, the Ranch will provide annually, a minimum of 60 hunter days and a written summary of hunter numbers and days on a hunting season basis. Historically, the Ranch has provided hunters access for elk, deer and antelope. This reporting requirement will allow both parties to evaluate compliance with historic hunter recreation opportunity.

* In the event a hunter is refused access for reasons other than those outlined above the landowner must contact the Region 3 Wildlife Manager.

* If the number of inquiries to hunt on the Ranch become excessive, FWP and the Ranch will cooperate in developing ways to streamline the hunting permission procedure.

GRAZING MANAGEMENT PLAN
ATTACHMENT A
STOREY-MADISON RANCH

DRAFT *GRAZING PLAN FOR THE STOREY-MADISON RANCH CONSERVATION EASEMENT*

Following is a draft rest-rotation-grazing plan for the Storey-Madison Ranch Conservation Easement (C.E.).

Background:

The land base consists of approximately 1,416, 179, and 5 acres of native range, irrigated meadow, and ranch facilities, respectively. Dominant grasses are western wheatgrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, feather grasses, and rye grass. A variety of shrub and forbe species are also present. The irrigated meadows are not part of this grazing plan and the landowner may graze them at his discretion.

Assumptions:

The approach described for livestock grazing management assumes the following:

1. Irrigated meadow in S21 is not part of this grazing plan.
2. A rest-rotation grazing system, meeting Montana FWP minimum standards, will be implemented for the 1,416 acres of native range.

AUMs/Stocking Rate

With adoption of an FWP approved grazing system, the ultimate stocking rate will be determined by the landowner, based on ability to comply with the grazing plan. Our approach to grazing on land forms such as this is not based on utilization levels or a prescribed number of days in each pasture. Our approach is to allow the plants to meet their biological needs by providing growing season rest and grazing season-long rest in a prescribed manner. This is the foundation on which the grazing rotation described in the section **Livestock Rotation** is based. The livestock operator grazes each pasture as he wishes within time frames described in the grazing plan.

Grazing System:

Neeessary Improvements

1. The approximately 1,416 acres of native rangeland will be divided into three units or pastures (~ 472 acres each). This could include merging some existing pastures in S21. There will also need to be some additional fence building, which may include adjustment of a portion of the irrigated meadow boundary fence in S21. This will involve about 1.5 miles of new fence.
2. As indicated on the attached map, three new water tanks and associated pipeline are necessary. On June 15th , Milt Dykstra visited the site. Milt is preparing a cost estimate for water development.

Livestock Rotation

The 1,416 acres of native range is divided into three pastures as indicated on the attached map. Each year, on about June 1, cattle are moved into one the three pastures (the pasture rested season long the previous year) and have the option of remaining there until seed-ripe occurs on bluebunch wheatgrass, which is near the end of the growing season (~ August 1). About August 1 (seed-ripe) cattle enter a second of the three pastures and remain there as long as the forage supply lasts or winter sets in. The third pasture is rested for the entire grazing season. Residual vegetation along with the currents years growth in this pasture will be available for grazing during June of the next year.

Each year on about June 1 the grazing season begins by placing cattle in the pasture that was rested the previous year, and at the end of the growing season (~ August 1) cattle enter the pasture that was grazed during the growing season of the previous year. The pasture that was grazed during late summer of the previous year is rested the next year. This grazing rotation is illustrated in the following table:

YEAR	PASTURE ONE*	PASTURE TWO	PASTURE THREE
1	A	B	C
2	B	C	A
3	C	A	B

* Refer to attached map for pasture layout.

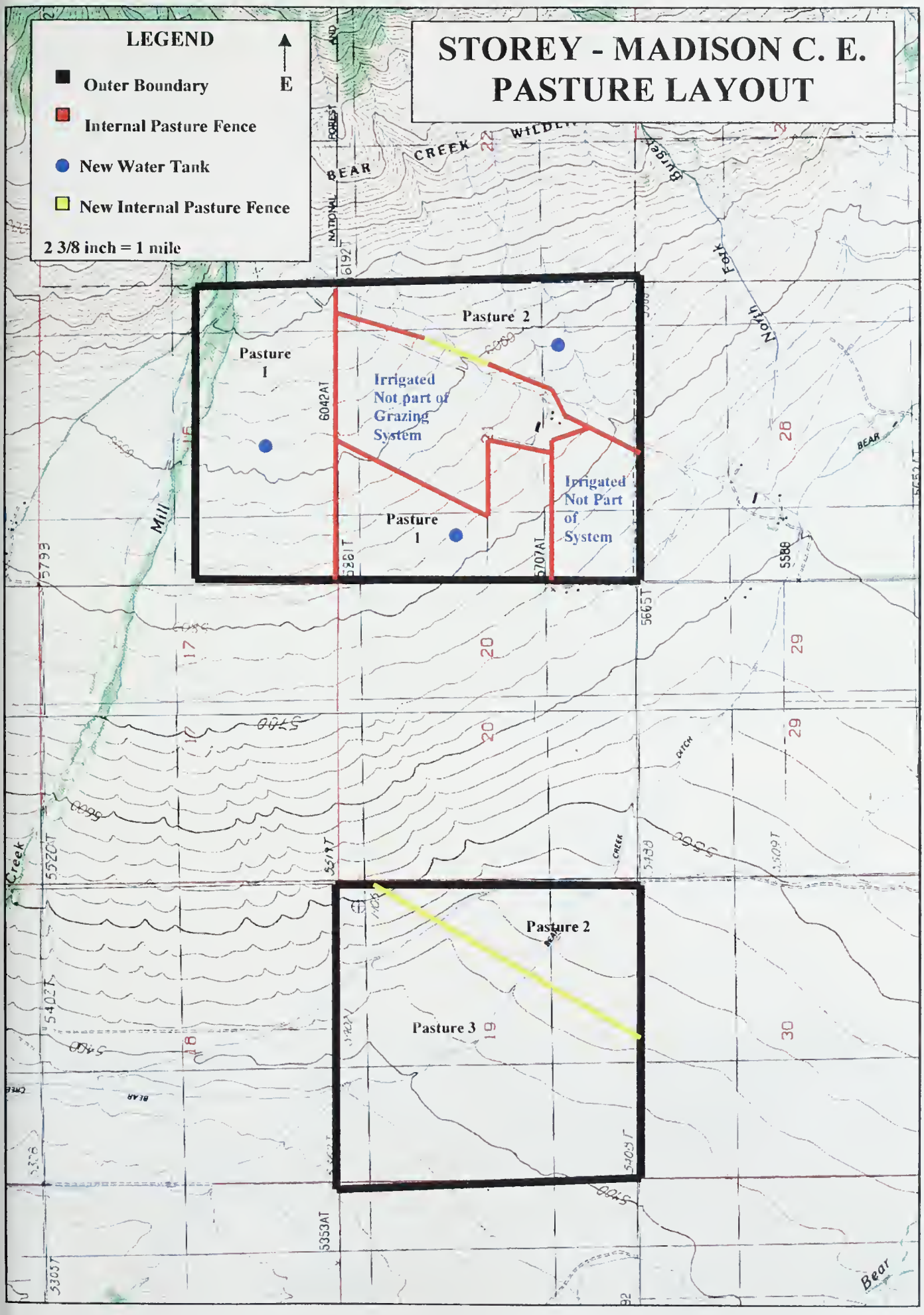
Year 4 the rotation starts over.

A= Livestock grazing from about June 1 to ~ August 1st.

B= Livestock grazing from ~ August 1st until the stockman decides to move cattle to the irrigated meadows.

C= Rested from livestock grazing for the entire grazing season.

In summary, the grazing system is designed for the native range and includes growing season grazing in one pasture each year, late summer grazing in a second pasture each year, and rest from livestock use in a third pasture each year. Over a three-year period, each pasture recieves all three treatments. The irrigated meadows are managed at the land owners discretion and are not included in the grazing system.


LEGEND
Outer Boundary
Internal Pasture Fence
New Water Tank
New Internal Pasture Fence
2 3/8 inch = 1 mile
E
STOREY - MADISON C. E.
PASTURE LAYOUT
Pasture 1
Pasture 2
Irrigated
Not part of
Grazing
System
Irrigated
Not Part
of
System
Pasture 1
Pasture 2
Pasture 3
BEAR CREEK
Mill
North Fork
6042AT
6192T
6207AL
5665T
5588
5793
5520T
5402T
5353AT
5305T

DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN
STOREY RANCH CONSERVATION EASEMENT
(Adeline M. Storey Living Trust)

I. INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of the Storey Ranch (RANCH) conservation easement is to conserve, protect and enhance in perpetuity the productivity and spacial quality of the land required by wildlife and agriculture. Although most wildlife species and agriculture will benefit from this type of land conservation, the terms of this conservation easement are directed at conserving the intermountain grassland habitat. The conservation easement also sets a framework for continued cooperation between the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) and the Ranch in utilizing general public hunting as the tool used to manage wildlife populations on the Ranch.

This management plan sets forth the FWP and Ranch's management responsibilities for implementing the provisions of the conservation easement. Because issues will change over time the management plan should be viewed as a flexible and working document that will receive periodic review.

II. DESCRIPTION OF AREA

The Storey Ranch is located about twelve miles south of Ennis and lies due east of Cameron, in the Madison Valley of southwestern Montana. Average annual precipitation ranges from 12 to 14 inches. Topography varies from flat valley land on the western fringe to moderate mountain slopes on the eastern portion of the Ranch. Mill Creek flows through the northern portion of the Ranch. Elevations range from 5,460 to 5860 feet.

Native vegetation communities range from predominantly western wheatgrass/ blue bunch wheatgrass/needle and thread grass/feather grass along the lower flat rangeland on the southwestern portion to Idaho fescue/ blue bunch wheatgrass/rye grass/big sagebrush along the upper elevations in the eastern portion.

The area provides important, key winter range and spring fawning habitat for the primary species, elk and mule deer. The Mill Creek drainage, flowing through the northern portion of the ranch provides year round range for moose. The area, particularly the western section, provides year round range for antelope. White-tailed deer use the area primarily as summer/fall range. Mountain lions use the area mostly during winter periods when ungulate populations are concentrated on the winter range. Black bear use is centered along Mill Creek during spring and fall, and occasionally a grizzly bear may pass through the area.

The Ranch has historically provided approximately 60 to 80 hunter days, annually. These hunter days are primarily elk, mule deer and antelope, but can also include white-tailed deer, moose, and occasionally black bear and Hungarian partridge. Because the ranch is winter range, the number of elk and deer using it will fluctuate, given annual winter conditions, and accordingly will affect

participation in the Hunting District 360 late season elk hunt. This accounts for the fluctuation in hunter days for any given year.

However, because the ranch is winter range for elk and deer that primarily use public lands during the spring, summer and fall, its wildlife contribution to the general public and specifically to the hunting public cannot be accurately assessed based solely on hunter days generated only on the Ranch.

III. GOAL

CONSERVE, PROTECT AND ENHANCE IN PERPETUITY THE WILDLIFE HABITAT AND AGRICULTURAL VALUES OF THE STOREY RANCH.

IV. OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

1. MANAGEMENT OF WILDLIFE HABITAT.

* Periodic review of those areas which are native rangelands, that have not been previously cultivated/plowed/tilled, will be conducted to monitor for any change in their status. The location and acreage will be set forth in the baseline report.

* A grazing system and approach has been developed in consultation between FWP and the Ranch for the native rangeland (see Grazing Plan for the Storey Ranch, Attachment B). The system does not apply to the irrigated meadows which the landowner(s) will continue to manage and graze as agricultural land at their discretion. The grazing system will be monitored on an annual basis to determine compliance with the prescribed grazing plan. This involves determining presence or absence of cattle in various pastures throughout the course of a year and across years (refer to livestock rotation as outlined in the grazing plan, Attachment B).

* Permanent vegetation monitoring sites will be established to monitor range land conditions over time and will be revisited on a 3 to 5 year schedule as needed.

* Periodic review of the land will be conducted to monitor any changes in the status of structures under terms of the easement.

2. MANAGEMENT OF WILDLIFE POPULATIONS.

* The emphasis for population management will be placed on elk. During any given winter, weather can strongly influence the number of wintering elk found in the Bear/Mill Creek area. Management will focus on maintaining winter elk numbers within the landowner tolerance and forage availability, in the range of 900 to 1,400 elk, i.e. no increase in elk numbers currently using the area.

* The Hunting District 360 late elk hunt will continue to be a necessary tool used to manage elk populations in the Bear/Mill Creek area. A significant portion of the wintering elk population that use this area, migrates from Yellowstone National Park and reaches this winter range, in most years, after the close of the general hunting season.

* On the Ranch as well as surrounding properties, game damage problems will continue to be managed through public hunting wherever possible. Game damage assistance will continue to be provided on an as needed basis to the Ranch and surrounding properties that qualify under FWP's game damage statutes and policies.

3. HUNTER/ACCESS MANAGEMENT.

* Access to the Ranch's Sections 17 and 20 is provided from the Bear Creek County Road. Access to the Ranch's Section 31 is provided across property owned by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and managed according to their policies regarding recreational access. The Bear Creek County Road borders this DNRC section on the north and the DNRC section lies adjacent to the Ranch's Section 31 to the south.

* Routine maintenance, signing and weed management at these and other access points on the Bear Creek WMA are all under FWP's responsibilities. Guidelines for weed management are addressed in the Region 3 Weed Management Environmental Analysis.

* General public hunting will be allowed throughout the Ranch. Daily distribution and numbers will be determined by the landowner, based on concerns for the safety of the landowner, ranch personnel, livestock and other hunters.

* Monitoring/reporting of hunter numbers will be done annually. The Ranch will provide annually, when public demand exists, a minimum of 60 hunter days and a written summary of hunter numbers and days on a hunting season basis. Historically, the Ranch has provided hunters access for elk, deer and antelope. This reporting requirement will allow both parties to evaluate compliance with historic hunter recreation opportunity.

* In the event a hunter is refused access for reasons other than those outlined above the landowner must contact the Region 3 Wildlife Manager.

* If the number of inquiries to hunt on the Ranch become excessive, FWP and the Ranch will cooperate in developing ways to streamline the hunting permission procedure.

GRAZING MANAGEMENT PLAN ATTACHMENT B STOREY RANCH

DRAFT *GRAZING PLAN FOR THE STOREY RANCH*

CONSERVATION EASEMENT

Following is a draft rest-rotation-grazing plan for the Storey Ranch Conservation Easement (C.E.).

Background:

The land base consists of about 1,920 acres of native range. Dominant grasses are western wheatgrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, and Idaho fescue. A variety of shrub and forbe species are also present (refer to the attached photo).

AUMs/Stocking Rate:

With adoption of the approved MFWP grazing system, the ultimate stocking rate will be determined by the landowner, based on ability to comply with the grazing plan. The approach is to allow the plants to meet their biological needs by providing growing season rest and grazing season-long rest in a prescribed manner. This is the foundation on which the grazing rotation described in the section **Livestock Rotation** is based. The livestock operator grazes each pasture as he wishes within the time frames described in the grazing plan.

Grazing System:

Necessary Improvements

The only required improvement is development of a water tank, on the boundary between pastures 1 and 2, as illustrated on the attached pasture layout map. Milt Dykstra has determined an estimated cost of $16,000 for developing a water tank system associated with both the Storey Ranch C.E. and Storey Madison C. E. projects. Most of these costs are for the Storey Madison C.E. water system. Attached is a map showing the layout of a proposed water system for both easements.

Livestock Rotation

The approximately 1,920 acres of native range is divided into three pastures, each one section in size (refer to the attached pasture layout map). Each year on about June 1, cattle are moved into one of the three pastures (the pasture rested season long the previous year) and have the option of remaining there until seed-ripe occurs on bluebunch wheatgrass, which is near the end of the growing season (~ August 1). About August 1 (seed-ripe) cattle enter a second of the three pastures and remain there as long as the forage supply lasts or winter sets in. The third pasture is rested for the entire

grazing season. Residual vegetation along with the current year's growth in this pasture will be available for grazing during June the next year.

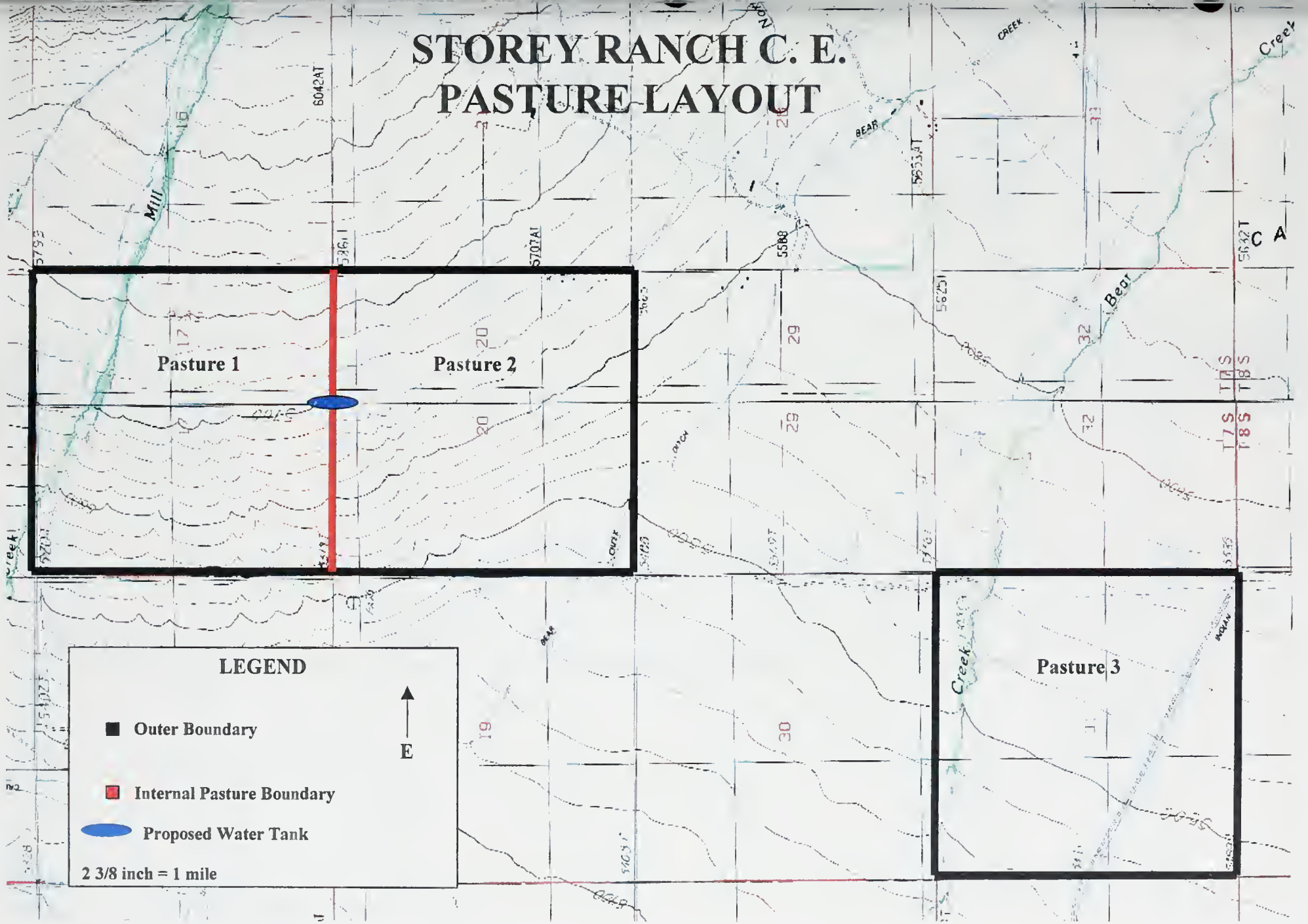
Each year about June 1 the grazing season begins by placing cattle in the pasture that was rested the previous year, and at the end of the growing season (~ August 1) cattle enter the pasture that was grazed during the growing season of the previous year. The pasture that was grazed after seed-ripe of the previous year is rested the next year. This grazing rotation is illustrated in the following table:

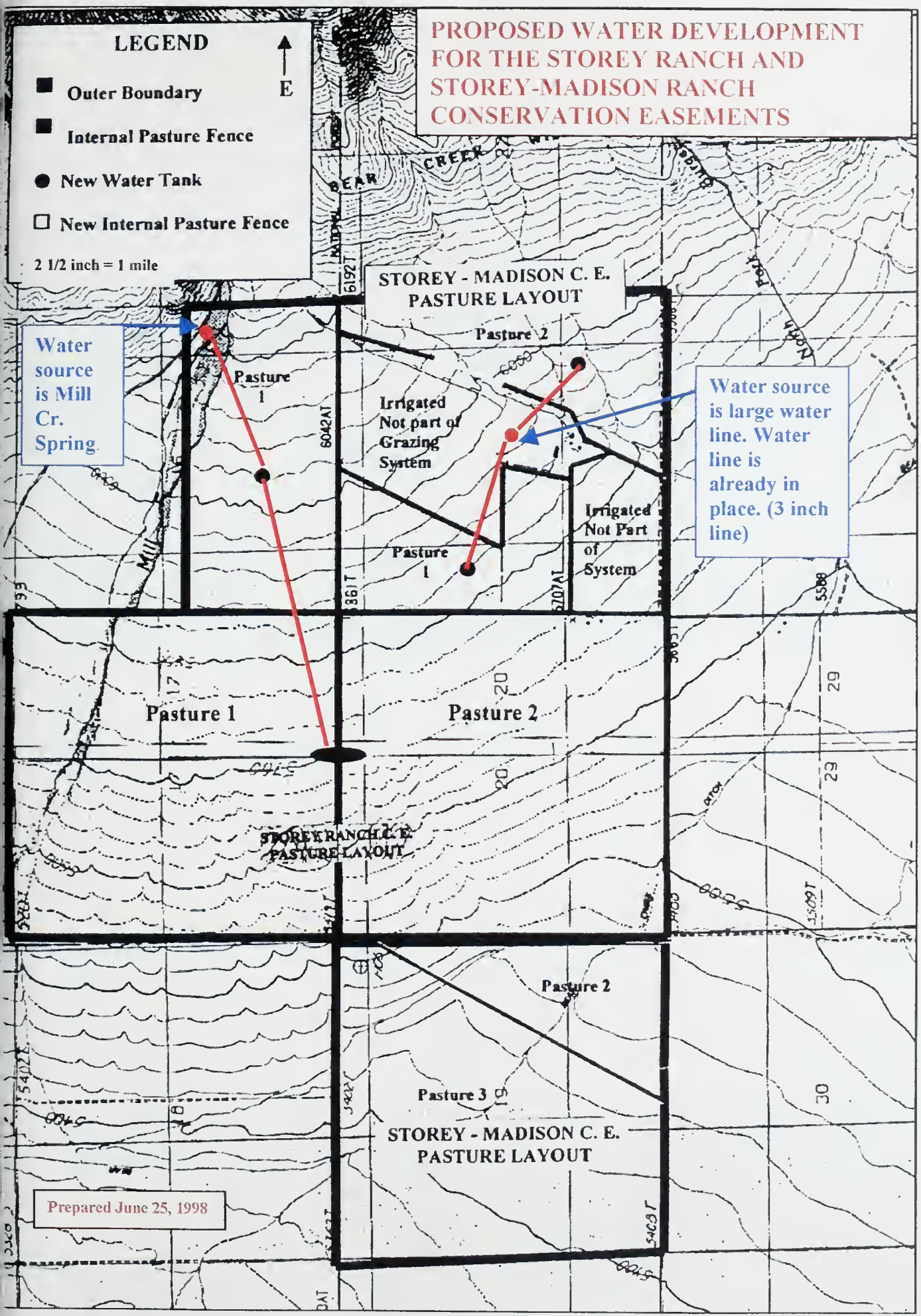
YEAR	PASTURE ONE*	PASTURE TWO	PASTURE THREE
1999	A	B	C
2000	B	C	A
2001	C	A	B

* Refer to attached map for pasture layout.
Year **4** the rotation starts over.
A= Livestock grazing from about June 1 to ~ August 1st.
B= Livestock grazing from ~ August 1st until end of the grazing season.
C= Rested from livestock grazing for the entire grazing season.

In summary, the grazing system is designed for the native range and includes growing season grazing in one pasture each year, late summer grazing in a second pasture each year, and rest from livestock use in third pasture each year. Over a three-year period, each pasture receives all three treatments.

STOREY RANCH C. E.
PASTURE LAYOUT




LEGEND
Outer Boundary
Internal Pasture Fence
New Water Tank
New Internal Pasture Fence
2 1/2 inch = 1 mile
E
PROPOSED WATER DEVELOPMENT FOR THE STOREY RANCH AND STOREY-MADISON RANCH CONSERVATION EASEMENTS
STOREY - MADISON C. E. PASTURE LAYOUT
Water source is Mill Cr. Spring.
Pasture 1
Pasture 2
Irrigated Not part of Grazing System
Water source is large water line. Water line is already in place. (3 inch line)
Irrigated Not Part of System
Pasture 1
Pasture 2
STOREY RANCH C. E. PASTURE LAYOUT
Pasture 2
Pasture 3
STOREY - MADISON C. E. PASTURE LAYOUT
Prepared June 25, 1998

STOREY-MADISON RANCH
(Choate Property)

CONSERVATION EASEMENT

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

Prepared by:
Rob Brooks
August, 1998

I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 526, passed by the 1987 Legislature (MCA 87-1-241 and MCA 87-1-242), authorizes Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to acquire an interest in land for the purpose of protecting and improving wildlife habitat. These acquisitions can be through fee title, conservation easements, or leasing. In 1989, the Montana legislature passed House Bill 720 requiring that a socioeconomic assessment be completed when wildlife habitat is acquired using Habitat Montana monies. These assessments evaluate the significant social and economic impacts of the purchase on local governments, employment, schools, and impacts on local businesses.

This socioeconomic evaluation addresses the purchase of a conservation easement on property presently owned by the Choate family. The report addresses the physical and institutional setting as well as the social and economic impacts associated with the proposed conservation easement.

II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

A. Property Description

The Storey-Madison Ranch is located about 15 miles south of Ennis, Mt. near the community of Cameron in Madison County. This easement encompasses approximately 1600 acres of sagebrush and grasslands with a small riparian corridor along the northern boundary. A detailed description of this property is included in the EA.

B. Habitat and Wildlife Populations

Mule deer use the upper portions of the property while white-tailed deer and antelope use the lower elevation parcels. Elk use all or portions of the property as winter range depending on the severity of the winter. The habitat also supports a host of nongame species from sandhill cranes to coyotes. A complete list of species is available in the EA.

C. Current Use

This property was leased to an adjacent rancher in the past but is currently being offered for sale.

D. Management Alternatives

1) Purchase a conservation easement on the property by FWP
2) No purchase

Alternative 1, the purchase of a conservation easement will provide long term protection for the agricultural activities this land supports as well as allow for the protection and enhancement of the native habitats and wildlife this land sustains.

The second alternative, the no purchase option, does not guarantee the protection of these resources from future development.

FWP Purchase of Conservation Easement

The intent of the Storey-Madison Ranch conservation easement is to protect and enhance the wildlife habitat currently found on the property while maintaining the agricultural character of the property. In addition, this easement will provide public access to the property in perpetuity. The Deed of Conservation Easement specifies the terms of the agreement. The major points presented here may affect the socioeconomic environment. They are:

1) Restrict residential subdivision or commercial development.
2) No commercial use of land and resources except those allowed by the Easement.
3) No new buildings or construction except that allowed by the Easement.
4) Mineral exploration/extraction are prohibited except for gravel to be used on property.
5) Timber removal prohibited except for firewood for landowners personal use.
6) Control or manipulation of sagebrush prohibited.
7) No cultivation or farming except on existing haylands.
8) No renting or leasing access to the land for hunting, fishing or winter recreation.

A complete list of the restrictions this easement has on the landowners and the rights granted to FWP are provided in the Deed of Conservation Easement for the Storey-Madison Ranch.

No Purchase Alternative

This alternative requires some assumptions since management of the property will vary depending on what the current owners decide to do with the property if FWP does not purchase a conservation easement.

Subdivision or development of the land is a possibility given the amount of subdivision already occurring in the immediate area. Public access has been allowed in the past but may not be depending on who purchases the property. The economic impacts associated with this alternative have not been calculated.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Section II identified the management alternatives this report addresses. The purchase of a conservation easement will provide long term protection of important wildlife habitat and elk winter range, help to preserve the open space characteristics of the area, keep the land in private ownership and provide for public access for hunting. Section III quantifies the social and economic consequences of the two management alternatives following two basic accounting stances: financial and local area impacts.

Financial impacts address the cost of the conservation easement to FWP and discuss the impacts on tax revenues to local government agencies including school districts.

Expenditure data associated with the use of the property provides information for analyzing the impacts these expenditures have on local businesses (i.e. income and employment).

A. Financial Impacts

The financial impacts on FWP are related to the purchase price of the conservation easement and maintenance/management costs. The Storey-Madison Ranch conservation easement will cost FWP $450,000. Costs associated with implementing the grazing plan (Attachment A) are associated with water and fence improvements for approximately $18,000. Maintenance/management costs related to the easement are associated with monitoring the property to insure the easement terms are being followed. These costs are unknown at this time.

The financial impacts to local governments are the potential changes in tax revenues resulting from the purchase of the conservation easement. The Storey-Madison Ranch easement will leave the land in private ownership and will not change the type or level of use on the property. There will be no significant changes in tax revenues to local governments including schools due to the easement.

B. Economic Impacts

The purchase of a conservation easement will not affect the agricultural activities on the Storey-Madison Ranch. Consequently there will not be any significant financial impacts to local businesses associated with the ranching/farming activities.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

As noted at the beginning of this document, the Storey-Madison Ranch is located in Madison County about 15miles south of Ennis, MT. near the community of Cameron.

This easement will provide long term protection for wildlife habitat. An easement on this property would also ensure public access for recreation hunting.

The purchase of a conservation easement by FWP on this property will not cause a reduction in tax revenues from their current levels to Madison County.

The agricultural/ranching operations will continue at their current levels. The financial impacts of the easement on local businesses will be neutral.

STOREY RANCH

CONSERVATION EASEMENT

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

Prepared by:
Rob Brooks
August, 1998

I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 526, passed by the 1987 Legislature (MCA 87-1-241 and MCA 87-1-242), authorizes Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to acquire an interest in land for the purpose of protecting and improving wildlife habitat. These acquisitions can be through fee title, conservation easements, or leasing. In 1989, the Montana legislature passed House Bill 720 requiring that a socioeconomic assessment be completed when wildlife habitat is acquired using Habitat Montana monies. These assessments evaluate the significant social and economic impacts of the purchase on local governments, employment, schools, and impacts on local businesses.

This socioeconomic evaluation addresses the purchase of a conservation easement on property presently owned by the Storey family. The report addresses the physical and institutional setting as well as the social and economic impacts associated with the proposed conservation easement.

II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

A. Property Description

The Storey property is located about 15 miles south of Ennis, Mt. near the community of Cameron in Madison County. This easement encompasses approximately 1920 acres of sagebrush and grasslands with a small riparian corridor along the northern boundary. A detailed description of this property is included in the EA.

B. Habitat and Wildlife Populations

Mule deer use the upper portions of the property while white-tailed deer and antelope use the lower elevation parcels. Elk use all or portions of the property as winter range depending on the severity of the winter. The habitat also supports a host of nongame species from sandhill cranes to coyotes. A complete list of species is available in the EA.

C. Current Use

This property is a working cattle ranch and until recently this operation leased the Chaote land.

D. Management Alternatives

1) Purchase a conservation easement on the property by FWP
2) No purchase

Alternative 1, the purchase of a conservation easement will provide long term protection for the agricultural activities this land supports as well as allow for the protection and enhancement of the native habitats and wildlife this land sustains.

The second alternative, the no purchase option, does not guarantee the protection of these resources from future development.

FWP Purchase of Conservation Easement

The intent of the Storey conservation easement is to protect and enhance the wildlife habitat currently found on the property while maintaining the agricultural character of the property. In addition, this easement will provide public access to the property in perpetuity. The Deed of Conservation Easement specifies the terms of the agreement. The major points presented here may affect the socioeconomic environment. They are:

1) Restrict residential subdivision or commercial development.
2) No commercial use of land and resources except those allowed by the Easement.
3) No new buildings or construction except that allowed by the Easement.
4) Mineral exploration/extraction are prohibited except for gravel to be used on property.
5) Timber removal prohibited except for firewood for landowners personal use.
6) Control or manipulation of sagebrush prohibited.
7) No cultivation or farming except on existing cultivated fields.
8) No renting or leasing access to the land for hunting, fishing or winter recreation.
9) No game farms
10) Prohibits all commercial/industrial uses except traditional agricultural uses.

A complete list of the restrictions this easement has on the landowners and the rights granted to FWP are provided in the Deed of Conservation Easement for the Storey property.

No Purchase Alternative

This alternative requires some assumptions since management of the property will vary depending on what the current owners decide to do with the property if FWP does not purchase a conservation easement.

Subdivision or development of the land is a possibility given the amount of subdivision already occurring in the immediate area. Public access has been allowed in the past but may not be depending on who purchases the property. The economic impacts associated with this alternative have not been calculated.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Section II identified the management alternatives this report addresses. The purchase of a conservation easement will provide long term protection of important wildlife habitat and elk winter range, help to preserve the open space characteristics of the area, keep the land in private ownership and provide for public access for hunting. Section III quantifies the social and

economic consequences of the two management alternatives following two basic accounting stances: financial and local area impacts.

Financial impacts address the cost of the conservation easement to FWP and discuss the impacts on tax revenues to local government agencies including school districts.

Expenditure data associated with the use of the property provides information for analyzing the impacts these expenditures have on local businesses (i.e. income and employment).

A. Financial Impacts

The financial impacts on FWP are related to the purchase price of the conservation easement and maintenance/management costs. The Storey property conservation easement will cost FWP $500,000. Costs associated with implementing the grazing plan (Attachment B) are associated with water improvements and are approximately $6,000. Maintenance/management costs related to the easement are associated with monitoring the property to insure the easement terms are being followed. These costs are unknown at this time.

The financial impacts to local governments are the potential changes in tax revenues resulting from the purchase of the conservation easement. The Storey easement will leave the land in private ownership and will not change the type or level of use on the property. There will be no significant changes in tax revenues to local governments including schools due to the easement.

B. Economic Impacts

The purchase of a conservation easement will not affect the agricultural activities on the Storey property. Consequently there will not be any significant financial impacts to local businesses associated with the ranching/farming activities.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

As noted at the beginning of this document, the Storey property is located in Madison County about 15 miles south of Ennis, MT. near the community of Cameron.

This easement will provide long term protection for wildlife habitat. An easement on this property would also ensure public access for recreation hunting.

The purchase of a conservation easement by FWP on this property will not cause a reduction in tax revenues from their current levels to Madison County.

The agricultural/ranching operations will continue at their current levels. The financial impacts of the easement on local businesses will be neutral.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